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## A MODERN DRAWING ROOM IN THE ELIZABETHAN STYLE.

BY FREDERICK PARSONS.



**T**UDENTS of English history consider the Elizabethan era a time when every phase of English life and thought was in the ascendant, save in the domain of art. To a certain degree such was the case; for, when we think of Shakespeare, Bacon, Raleigh, the Armada and other contemporary names and incidents which will ever remain of world-wide and historical magnitude, small wonder that the still, small voice of national art should have left but a fainter echo resounding in these later ages.

The study and admiration, if worthy, of things essentially English in sentiment and character can scarcely fail to profit any lover of art in general, and of home art in particular. It has been well said regarding our modern American characteristics that the French styles and reproductions appeal far more to the spirit of our age than do those of any period of English work. Even so; but there is little reason why our native efforts should still be so wedded to the so-called "Empire." We have had so much of this interminable "wreath, ribbon, torch and lyre" business of late years that scarcely any new wooden tenement is erected without the brainless-looking swag being used as an exterior putty frieze, and the wreath and ribbon staring out at one from the bespattered parlor wall.

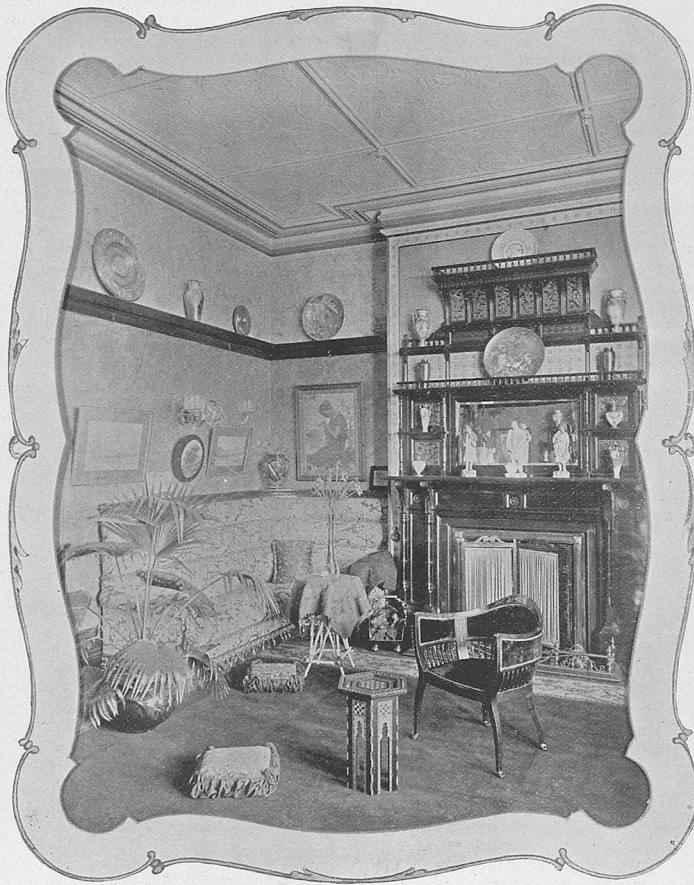
On the other hand it must not be supposed that one's personal predilection for the Elizabethan, or even for the Victorian, have no support in the professional world around us. The reverse is rather the case; for several eminent architects of Boston strongly sympathize therewith; and one particularly has just builded himself a fine city residence, modeled upon the exact lines of an old London eighteenth-century house, with, I believe, all the old decorative crudities of green flock, embossed gilt papers and so on. This latter extreme instance is but one example out of many which the writer, less than the reader, has sympathy with. "Anglo" or any other mania in art is as much to be deplored as hydro, anglo or any other "phobia." True art knows no nationality; for, although we commonly associate different forms and phases of construction and ornament with particular nations and periods, no style has

ever lived and died unto itself. So far as one may judge by personal study and observation, English-made furniture, under the category of "antique," is one of the most valued items of a cultured New Englander's possessions. As a Christmas gift the antique chair or table takes first place in Boston for cost and honor in the list of things useful; and, unfortunately, the real or assumed age is commonly the most important factor in its value. Certainly the woodworkers of the eighteenth century produced strong and, in the main, comfortable chairs; but this did not insure their being comparatively any more artistic than first attempts at wall-paper printing.

To some of our readers any questioning of the artistic merit in antique furniture of the "Colonial" period, and with which the names of those grand old English cabinet makers, Sheraton and Hepplewhite, are often associated, may read as rank heresy. As a matter of fact, however, it is very doubtful whether New England contains a dozen undoubtedly genuine pieces of either these masters' handiwork; and it is very certain that, while age and ugliness, judged by our present standards of applied

art, often go together in highly-prized "antiques," these latter have not always even the supposedly redeeming feature of age. To go back in antiquity from the Georgian era of "Revolutionary" times to the period commonly covered by the term "Elizabethan" is rather a progressive than a retrograde movement, so far as old English furniture and interiors are concerned. The same conditions which are evident to the student and antiquarian in connection with the ancient of all natural art, the Egyptian.

The birth of the "Elizabethan" style of architecture, as the early English child of the Renaissance is known, saw the decline and death of the once beautiful but then debased Gothic. The first historical evidence of the classic or antique revival may be dated from 1518, when Henry VIII. engaged the Italian, Torrigiano, to produce a monument to the memory of Henry VII., and which work may be seen in Westminster Abbey to-day. From



A MODERN ELIZABETHAN DRAWING ROOM. EXECUTED BY FREDERICK PARSONS.

that year and for just a century afterward until Inigo Jones, in 1619, commenced the rebuilding of Whitehall Palace, London, British architecture and furnishings were more truly native and insular in their material expression than they ever had or have been, before or since.

In the early stages of that era the Italian artists left in England by Torrigiano, and whose work was favored by the merry and much-married monarch, exercised considerable influence over the English master masons. Later on, the advent of Holbein, and many painters and designers from

Germany and Holland, gave to the "Elizabethan" many of the ornamental characteristics which abound in the Flemish Renaissance. But through all this the native English product was the parent tree upon which the foreign element was grafted. We have undubitable evidence of this in the array of British names handed down to us. John Thorpe, who, in 1607, designed, among several fine baronial mansions, the historical Holland House, Kensington; Shute, the author of the first scientific work on architecture in the English tongue; then Harrison, Bradshaw, the Smithsons, the Scotch Brothers, the Brothers Adam and others.

The architectural beauty of Holland House and its historical traditions, which no few Americans are familiar with, gives us an example of the best old English work; for although alterations and interior decorations were made at different periods after its erection, the same admirable work and sentiment pervades the whole. The respective merits of the Elizabethan and the Georgian eras of English industrial art could not be more strongly emphasized than by a comparison of the native Holland House with the crudities displayed in Renaissance and "Colonial" art and architecture, of which later period old Buckingham House and its added (Georgian) wings stand as an equally reliable and ugly example.

The characteristics of Elizabethan ornaments are probably less familiar in this country than those of the various French styles. It possessed particular features in its strapwork, of Flemish origin; its bands, nail heads, and evidencing the early Italian influence, some beautiful scrolls with grotesque heads and figures. The late J. B. Waring's pen tells us that the shell or structure of Elizabethan architecture was generally upon simple Italian lines, but certainly this did not take from the purity of the English expressions and interior arrangements. Furniture was not then a portable commodity made in sets by the thousand, bought and sold with so little regard to the building; it was part of the apartment itself. Turning to the pages of an old English author he writes: "The walls of our houses on the inner sides be either hanged with tapestry, arras-work, or painted cloths, whereon divers histories, or hearbes, beasts, knots and such like are stained, or else they are seeled with oke of our owne, or wainscot of the East Countries; whereby our roomes are not a little commended, made warme, and much more close than they would be."

But the "fayre ladies" of Elizabeth's Court, whom tradition tells us fared sumptuously on roast beef and foaming ale, knew not the delights of a "with-drawing" room, and therefore, 'tis only with the hall, the library, or best of all, the dining room, that we could consistently reproduce the main features of "oke of our owne" and "tapestry" or "painted cloths" in the Elizabethan style "pure and simple."

In seriously commending the adaptation of such interiors to modern service in this country, we find several of the ancient conditions duplicated. The present plentiful supply of native oak and other hard woods; the comparative cheapness of its application—not of hand labor certainly, but by the modern forces of electric power and woodworker's machinery. Beyond this, we have the undoubted favor which womankind especially entertain toward tapestry or textiles for wall decorations; and lastly, the sentiment of the open fire-hearth, which probably will never leave the English-speaking race. But there is still another important item. The old national woodwork of the sixteenth century, of which take the library and banquet hall of Holland House in evidence thereof, has a feeling of structural *lightness*, of *spirited grace* and *delicacy*, beside which the contemporary work of the French and Flemish Renaissance was crude, clumsy and ponderous. Examples of the latter are probably more easy of access to the modern student and architect than the old English and Scotch gems, but we know of no more interesting and profitable field of research than the "Elizabethan."

The fact of the modern drawing room and boudoir—so particularly *feminine* in arrangement and sentiment—having no part and parcel in the ancient English mansion is no argument against a modern adaptation to either apartment. The breadth and dignity of the Elizabethan, the quaint richness of the more florid Queen Anne, and the extreme vivacity of the many-sided Louis XV. all find clients to whom the peculiarities of each appeal. It is the province of the trained decorator, while catering to all rational minds, to sympathize with any intelligent person's idiosyncracies and to provide results which both

please and elevate. "Just now," my professional reader may wish to interject, "the decorator's 'province' is to make a little money go a long way." True enough, but better times are coming, wherein he or she, having their lamps of beauty and knowledge well filled with oil, like the wise virgins of old, will be well rewarded.

As a recent example of drawing-room decoration, the subjoined photograph may not be without interest alike to lay and professional reader. An apartment about thirty feet long, twenty broad and fourteen high, its proportions were well-fitted for the old English sentiment, pitched in a high and delicate "key." In the ceiling we have an effect of pure Elizabethan paneling, each division being about five feet square. A pre-existing plaster cornice of bold and simple character had its "crown" member matched in the contours of the wooden panel molding; so that when carefully mitered together, with the carved terminals at intersections, the whole ceiling and cornice formed one harmonious whole. Still carrying out the old feeling of hand-modeled plaster work presented by the ceiling, we have in the frieze, about forty-two inches deep, a beautiful example of modern skill, in perfect similitude of the *Italian* phase of Elizabethan scrolls, figures, griffins, etc., in a relief of fully one and a half inches.

Beneath the frieze the combined hard-wood shelf and picture rail, with its classic dentils and generous proportions, form a fitting base for the noble frieze. In dealing with the handsome mantel and chimney piece of more modern spirit it will be observed that the chimney breast received a special panel treatment. Small hard-wood marginal molding to a border in simple relief design inclosed a plain background of deep "old gold" in tone with the wall paper. Beneath the frieze base we have on the remainder of wall space, a quaint and beautiful design in English wall-paper by the master hand of C. F. A. Voysey. The homelike, comfortable and yet refined sentiment of this room may be fairly gathered by our "corner." In color, we have a scheme of browns, golden browns, creams and ivory white with touches of gilding. The woodwork, mantel and "overdoor" in American walnut and ebony; the walls in several subtle self tones of "old gold"; frieze rail and self in walnut, and our high relief frieze in "old ivory" with mellowed "old rose" water-scumble in its shadows and recesses. The cornice lightens up from old golds to the ivory white of paneled ceiling; while a line of gilding on each panel edge and a gilded backing on the carved terminals relieves, without breaking up the unity of, this refined and handsome ceiling.

A typical room in a typical English style of house, located on the outskirts of a busy seaport town, these facts are brought strongly to mind as we turn to the main feature of daytime interest and attraction, the snug yet roomy bay window. Separating this division from the outlines of the room proper we have that admirable modern feature, a window screen or "fitment." This possesses the lightsome grace of fretwork allied to the dignity of the style under consideration, emphasizing the charms of one modern drawing in the Elizabethan style. With its sunny aspect consistent in all the English details of picturesque terraces, velvety lawns, and fields of many hues stretching far away down to the seashore, the distinct screech of the locomotive, or the huge chimney stack of the incoming steamer, alone serve to remind us that we live in the mighty age, not of "Elizabeth" but of "Victoria."

#### DECORATIVE NOTE.

RENAISSANCE furniture was ornamented with arabesques, or with panels and flat moldings carved with "strapwork," a combination of ribands or straps in various folds often intermixed with flowers and fruits. Heraldry, also, with its rich mantlings and quaint escutcheons, supplied frequent ornaments. Grotesque terminal figures, human headed, supported the front of the dresser or cabinet.

A very beautiful method of ornamentation was the "pietra dura," or mosaic paneling of hard stones; an exceedingly laborious and costly work. The materials were agate, carnelian, lapis-lazuli, or amethyst, and each part was ground to an exact shape and the whole fitted accurately together. Besides being formed into panels for table tops and cabinet fronts, "pietra dura" was let into wood, and with its bright colors helped the somber tone of the walnut or ebony base.